**Nothing But 'Net – Week #12 – 01/14/2019 – Best. Start. Ever.**

The (#2) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, and they won them both.  On Thursday (01/10/2019), they beat Illinois 79-69 in Champaign, then on Sunday (01/13/2019), they beat Northwestern 80-60 in sold-out Crisler Arena.  The two wins raise Michigan's record to 17-0 (6-0 in the Big Ten).

Time for more Questions & Answers:

Q: What's this about "best start ever"?

A: This season's Michigan team just set a new school record for the best start ever.  The previous record was 16-0, shared by the 1985-86 and 2012-13 teams.  Michigan is now one of only two undefeated teams left in the country, along with (#4) Virginia.  Going back to last season, which ended with a 14-game winning streak before the loss in the National Championship game vs. Villanova, Michigan has now won 31 of their last 32 games, which is quite a record.

Q: So, were these good, solid wins?

A: Yes, they were.  Illinois and Northwestern aren't contenders for the Big Ten title, in fact Illinois is likely to end up 14$^{th}$ this season, but a 10-point road win and a 20-point home win are both good, solid wins.

In the Illinois game, Michigan led from start to finish, but never quite put the game on ice.  They had their chances, but they always missed the crucial shot that would have put the game out of reach.  On the other hand, every time Illinois started creeping up, Michigan answered with enough offense to keep them at arm's length.  Michigan kept the lead in the 6-8 point range for most of the game, occasionally stretching it to 10-12 points, and occasionally letting it dwindle to the 3-5 point range.

Michigan also led wire-to-wire in the Northwestern game, but they got the lead up in the 18-20 point range just before halftime, and kept it in the 16-18 point range for most of the 2$^{nd}$ half.  Northwestern put on a furious comeback attempt in the 2$^{nd}$ half, but that only got them within 12 points, and Michigan pushed it back up to 20 points pretty quickly.  The key stretch in the game came in the last 1:55 of the 1$^{st}$ half.  Northwestern had just hit a 3-pointer to pull within 12 points (40-28), when Michigan just exploded.  Jon Teske hit a pair of 3-pointers, just 19 seconds apart, Charles Matthews had a steal that led to a breakaway dunk, then Zavier Simpson had another steal that led to a short jumper with 7 seconds left.  Those 10 points just crushed any hope Northwestern had of getting back in the game.  It was very exciting, and very impressive.  It really got the sold-out crowd going.

Q: Any complaints about the officiating this week?

A: Nope.  They were mediocre, but in a balanced way.

Q: What do the team stats tell us?

A: The stats weren't bad this week:

In the Illinois game, Michigan shot pretty well overall (28-for-62 = 45.2%), they shot 3-pointers pretty poorly (5-for-19 = 26.3%), and they shot free throws very well (18-for-22 = 81.8%).  They won the rebounding battle (38-30), and they tied in the turnover battle (14-14).  The extra 8 possessions due to rebounding made the difference in this game.

In the Northwestern game, Michigan shot very well overall (31-for-59 = 52.5%), they shot 3-pointers well (11-for-27 = 40.7%), and they shot free throws very well (7-for-9 = 77.8%).  They won the rebounding battle (33-28) and the turnover battle (9-13).  All those extra possessions + good shooting = a 20-point win.

Q: Who looked good for Michigan?

A: Several players had a good week:

- Zavier Simpson was the high scorer for Michigan in both games, with 16 points vs. Illinois and a career-high 24 points vs. Northwestern.  He was brilliant in the Northwestern game, shooting 9-for-17 overall, and 5-for-10 from 3-point range.  Those five 3-pointers are a career high for him.
- Jon Teske was the other big star this week, with double figures in both games (13 and 17 points), and 11 rebounds in each game, for two consecutive double-doubles.  He shot very well: 5-for-8 (1-for-3 from 3-point range) vs. Illinois, and 7-for-11 (3-for-5 from deep) vs. Northwestern.  He hit all three of his 3-pointers vs. Northwestern in two and a half minutes just before halftime, igniting the offense and the crowd.
- Charles Matthews also hit double figures in both games (14 and 13 points), and fired up the crowd in the Northwestern game with a couple thunderous dunks.  The only downside: poor 3-point shooting (0-for-1 and 0-for-2).
- Ignas Brazdeikis was the fourth starter who hit double figures in both games (15 and 11 points). He also had trouble with his 3-point shooting (1-for-2 and 0-for-2).
- Jordan Poole was the only starter who didn't hit double figures in both games (10 and 7 points).  He didn't shoot 3-pointers well either (1-for-6 and 1-for-3).
- Isaiah Livers was back, after missing two games with back spasms, and he looked fine out there.  He didn't hit double figures in either game (9 and 8 points), but he provided the spark that he usually brings.  He had a mixed week shooting 3-pointers (0-for-3 and 2-for-2).

Q: Who looked not-so-good for Michigan?

A: A couple players had an "off" week:

- Eli Brooks had another ineffective week, with 2 and 0 points.
- Austin Davis played a minute or two in each game, but didn't take a shot.

Q: Who else played?

A: Coach Beilein went with his very short bench (8 players) in the Illinois game, which was close, but put several of the scout team players into the Northwestern game in the last two minutes: David DeJulius, Brandon Johns, Jr., Adrien Nuñez, Rico Ozuna-Harrison, and Luke Wilson.  None of them scored.

This was the first time that Ozuna-Harrison has played this season, and I didn't even realize that he was on the roster.  He was a player on the team last season, and at the beginning of this season I reported that he had switched to being a manager, but I guess he's back on the playing roster.  Sorry I didn't have a short bio of him in the Season Preview, and he certainly would have gotten a solid "Incomplete" in the Midterm Grades.  I'll keep track of him from now on.

Q: Who didn't play?

A: A couple of the scout team players didn't play this week: C.J. Baird and Colin Castleton.

Q: What did we learn this week?

A: We learned that Michigan can maintain their solid level of play against the non-contenders in the Big Ten.  That's important.  Michigan is tied for 1st place in the Big Ten with the Little Brothers, and they can't afford to lose a game to any of the non-contenders.  They need to win all the games that they're supposed to win, and play their best games against the other contenders.  Those games are coming up soon.

Q: What's next for Michigan?

A: Michigan only plays one game this week, one on the road.  On Saturday (01/19/2019, 12:00 noon EST, ESPN2), they play at Wisconsin.

Wisconsin is currently 11-5 (3-2 in Big Ten), with impressive wins over Xavier, Stanford, Oklahoma, N.C. State, and Iowa, and less-than-impressive losses to Marquette, Western Kentucky, and Minnesota.  They have some height (two 7'0" guys, a 6'11" guy, and a 6'10" guy), and one of the best players in the Big Ten: Ethan Happ.  They were ranked for most of the non-conference schedule, until they lost to Western Kentucky and Minnesota in consecutive games.  It used to be nearly impossible to beat Wisconsin in the Kohl Center, but the last few seasons have been different.  Michigan will have to play very well to beat them, but they are beatable.

That's it for this week.  Check back next week to see how Michigan did.

Go Blue!